

TheObserver

MAGAZINE

29.03.15



**“I DON’T
LISTEN
TO MUSIC,
WATCH
TV OR
READ”**

**Nigel Farage
interviewed by
Rachel Cooke**



Helping teenage mums **Rupert Everett in Venice** **Nigel Slater** **Kim Cattrall**



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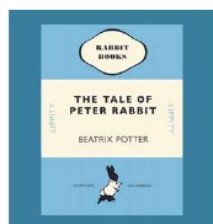
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Eva Wiseman

We're all told that breastfeeding is the best start you can give your baby, but it can also be bloody agony – both physically and emotionally. So give new mothers a break

"This is a column about breastfeeding" is a sentence I never thought I'd write. All those "Put a sheet over your tits, woman, says Claridges" stories happened in the write-off months when I'd recently given birth, when the baby was leeching to my chest for 20 out of every 24 hours, and it felt like everybody had an opinion about breastfeeding. Except me. Except me, down there in the milky trenches, as far from an opinion as I was from eight hours' sleep, ie very far away indeed.

Today I am saner. I have yet to sleep for longer than an episode of *House of Cards*, but I can nod in the right bits of a conversation and smile at certain jokes. And as I digest the new study on the benefits of breastfeeding (one of the first, I think, to rule out the variable factors that can skew results, like class and income), I feel an opinion about to land. Except then it floats away again.

The study suggests that the longer a baby is breastfed, the more successful and intelligent they become. Which is great news for those of us who spent a month blindly spearing our swollen breasts into the mouth of a tiny stranger; those of us who felt the fear of flashing our father-in-laws and did it anyway, whose nipples were briefly no longer nipples but kosher sausages. Those of us who bled through our new white M&S nursing bras and opened the door to postmen with one tit swinging

free. Great news. But for the mothers who didn't breastfeed, reports that she's screwed up her baby's chance of a decent life before they've even learned to burp by themselves must smart, to say the least.

The thing is, breastfeeding is hard. Despite eventually getting the hang of it weeks after leaving hospital, I've seen the way it could have gone. The agony of trying and trying to feed a screaming baby with your aching empty body, and then the agony of the guilt when at dawn you resort to formula. The agony of having to go back to work after a couple of months and leaving the baby at home with a bottle, and the agony of being in a group where sad smiles are exchanged as you mix the baby's powdered lunch. The agony of a health worker telling you you're just not working hard enough. The agony. Those first few weeks, last summer, my God, I see them so clearly now, from this distance. From the beach of here, I see what a hell it was. Our flat a sauna, our relationship a sauna. And all the time her primal hunger filling the rooms like the hum of a fridge.

There's a reason so many women stop breastfeeding after six weeks.

It's not just because that's when the official help dwindles, it's because that's when we go outside alone. Most mothers have got the message about the benefits of breast milk, but it can be hard to reconcile that with the feeling like you're going to die, again. And when you're out in the world for the first time, limping, your hair having plaited itself in its own filth, and you have to feed in the face of hard-eyed strangers, even the most well-meaning new mother might think twice. Formula milk is not purely, as a recent *Guardian* writer implied, a marketing scam – it is a life raft for many women. Rather than an ignorant choice, a selfish choice, it is often the choice of a good mother just trying to keep everyone alive. Without belittling an important study, research like this is delivered heavy with spin and expectation, and when it concerns women who are at their most vulnerable, we should be mindful of its impact.

Should these studies be stopped? God no. Should mothers avoid them? No.

But with these matters of babying, and the wild darkness of birth, it seems things are never as simple as do or don't, except in the matter of making a judgment on someone else's experience. There it is, a butterfly opinion. I caught it in my hand. ■

“There's a reason many women stop breastfeeding after six weeks – because that's when we go outside alone



Life class

Katharine Whitehorn on avoiding the stove

A reader once wrote to me complaining that her husband had retired, but still expected her to cook at least two meals a day. This was ages ago and she felt there wasn't much she could do about it, but luckily times have changed. So now, if a wife has found a more fruitful or amusing way to pass her time, there is no reason for her kids or kisser to go hungry. There are so many things you can buy that you once had to cook. It's not even more expensive. But we still feel guilty about it.

Odd, really; we never felt we ought to make our own cheese, or brew our own beer, because we grew up knowing that these were bought. But about anything mother used to make we absurdly feel we'd be letting down the side if we simply bought it.

Of course, there are other motives than duty for cooking. In some houses you're only really warm in winter if you're hanging over the stove. Plenty of people love cooking or find it lets them off other demands. My husband made no bones about his Chinese cooking being "a work-avoidance scheme" when he might have been writing.

Over the years, I have fed the family and even written a couple of cook books, but I have decided that enough is enough. I used to make my own taramasalata, but now I buy it ready made – and then put it on stoned half avocados as a starter. Do try it. ■



Why it works Gwyneth Paltrow

Actor, 42

The hair

So golden she must brush it with a honeycomb.

The dress

Apparently, it's actually gold.

The cut-outs

Can you think of a part of your body you'd less like people to notice? She's not you.

The studs

Soon the Daleks will be... the supreme beings... in... the universe.

The whole

Cool, elegant, a tall glass-of-milk substitute. Gwyneth winneth.

■ RHUK SAMADDER



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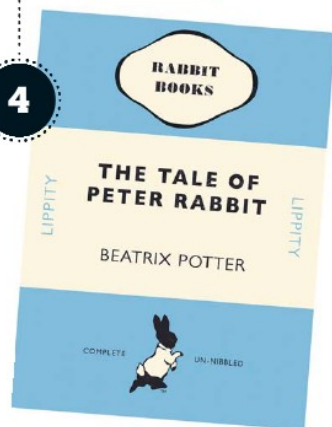
UP FRONT

This week's

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Peter Rabbit makeover

Posh Penguin makeover of Beatrix Potter's classic to mark the publisher's 80th anniversary. £5.99, foyles.co.uk



4

Stone circles

White topaz teardrop bracelet from StandSeven, a new online marketplace which supports the livelihoods of artisans. £55, standseven.com



1

Natty zip-up

Light, smart summer jacket perfect for the warm months ahead. £425, stoneisland.co.uk



2

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Apparently the purest in the world. It's extra-virgin centrifuged. Use it well. £14.99, jaxcoco.com



5

Paint it black

The Brompton Bicycle folding bike is now available in a limited edition in snazzy jet black. From £945, brompton.com



3

This much I know

Kim Cattrall

Actor, 58

I'll go anywhere and am very adaptive, so long as I can take my cat. Kobi Cat is also very adaptive, even though she's 17. So far she's been to Liverpool, Chichester, London, Toronto, Vancouver and LA – she has her own passport and flies in the hold. I kind of have to take her, or she gives me a lot of shit.

There is still a stigma attached to people who don't want to have kids.

But listen: I don't know a kid who thanks their parents for the nappies they changed. Although I always thought I would have a family, I've found other ways to channel a maternal instinct, and I think the young people I know relate to me because I've lived a different life from their parents.

I'm reconnecting with my roots in the Pacific Northwest. I've bought a place on Vancouver Island, right on the sea, and it's magical – there are sea lions that go back and forth in front of the house all day long. When I first moved there I thought I'd have to go back to New York because of all the honking. Now the noise lulls me to sleep.

I didn't really want to play Samantha in *Sex and the City*. I'd just turned 41 when they offered me the part and I thought: "Oh no, I can't do the femme fatale thing any more." Now I see 40 as very young. 50 is the new 40. It makes my 20s seem prehistoric.

The menopause was an awakening. People always talk of it as a sort of downturn for women, a negative thing, but I saw it as the start of new phase, a final chapter. It was: "What shall I do for the next 30 or 40 years, and with whom?"

Hollywood still doesn't know how to deal with a lot of the issues that affect older women. I don't really see myself in most of the film or television that's been made – or even really in advertising. I still think most of the best roles are in the theatre.

Part of me will always think I'm British. I was born in Liverpool, although I moved to Vancouver when I was three months old. When I was 11, I came back to England for a year to live with my aunt. I didn't want to leave. I remember thinking I had found people who were more like me.

The men I've been with have all been pleasant-enough looking. But for me, sex starts in the brain. What's going on lower down doesn't make me want to possess someone; it's usually a little twinkle about them or a sense of humour.

My family were all very studious, whereas I was the kid who went to tap-dancing class and made up my own steps. I don't think they were surprised when I said I wanted to act.

My job is probably the reason I've had three failed marriages. Although I loved those men very much, I don't think I had taken into consideration the realities of my true love. Except for the first time: the first time I was just too young. And my boyfriend needed a green card.

Kim Cattrall stars in Sensitive Skin, a six-part series starting on Sky Arts on Wednesday 1 April at 10pm. Follow her on Twitter @kimcattrall

“““

The men I've been with have all been pleasant-enough looking. But for me, sex starts in the brain



To read all the interviews in this series, go to theguardian.com/thismuchiknow



Photograph **Pål Hansen**

Nigel's making plans for us

**With the election campaign
officially starting tomorrow,
Nigel Farage is preparing
for the scrap of his life.
Rachel Cooke discovers
what drives the Ukip leader**

'Whatever my faults,
I have some principles':
Nigel Farage with a few of
his favourite things





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At the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, Nigel Farage stands at a podium waiting to address the Homes for Britain rally. Beneath its vast dome he looks small, depleted. The arms hang limply at his side; his forehead shines with perspiration. Perhaps he is wondering: will this be a tough crowd, or a sympathetic one?

Jonathan Dimbleby, the rally's compere, has just reminded the audience it must treat each speaker with equal courtesy; it's clear that he fears Farage will be booed.

Nevertheless, this could go either way. Out here – I'm in the Gods, fighting the tears brought on by the appearance of a choir whose members have all experienced homelessness – are

2,300 people from 300 organisations. Many, it's true, are liberal-minded campaigners

for social housing. But among their number are also hundreds of developers and landlords. They may look on the leader of Ukip more kindly, particularly were he to announce that he and his libertarian band of brothers are set to give up on the green belt.

The short film we've been watching ends, and Farage begins. He has eight minutes to set out his stall. He kicks off with some personal stuff. He is, he tells us, a sentimentalist. He grew up in Kent, not far from where Darwin wrote *On The Origin of Species*, and he would not see its hedgerows destroyed for all the world. So the green belt must remain. However, unlike everyone else, he is not going to drone on about housing supply: it's demand that interests him. Though Ukip believes in the idea of a "brownfield revolution" – it would remove stamp duty and VAT from all new builds on brownfield sites – the essence of his message is that the housing crisis can only be solved if net migration is curbed. Only one party has the courage to do this: his own.

In the hall, the atmosphere shifts. The rally's good humour has dimmed. Farage, though, seems to grow more confident, drawing strength both from his audience's disdain and from the fact that the finishing line is now in sight. His face might be slick with sweat, but by the time he stops speaking his manner is shot through with the tinny bravado that comes of being flooded with relief (only rarely does Farage speak from notes; mostly he prefers to wing it).

From my seat, I consider my next move. His people have an aversion to answering my calls. They seem not to want me to see him in any other context than one they're able tightly to control. But the Methodist Central Hall stands next to one of his favourite pubs, the Westminster Arms; it's hard to believe he'll slip away without scooting over there for a pint of Spitfire or Whitstable Bay. As he exits the stage I rush out, determined to catch him.

"Ha ha!" booms Farage delightedly when, the next morning, I confess that I waited in vain for him outside the Westminster Arms. "Two years ago, during Ukip's conference, that's precisely what I did. I slipped out for a pint. But alas, I had to get on yesterday." He emits a hammy sigh. "It's a difficult time. I've got to support the party in other parts of the country, and I'm a member of the European parliament, and I'm fighting in South Thanet, a seat that isn't safe like those of the other leaders." Is he knackered? "Yes. But then I have been for years. Ukip really started to motor at the end of 2011, and it has been nonstop ever since."

It is budget day. Across Lambeth Bridge, George Osborne will shortly begin shooting Labour foxes. Yet here is


Farage, marooned at the publisher of *The Purple Revolution*, his new book, giving interviews. It goes without saying that he'd rather be in front of the television, fag in hand. In this cramped corner office, moreover, it is greenhouse hot, and though this seems not to bother his "senior adviser" Raheem Kassam – a man who wears his overcoat as if it were armour – Farage is distinctly pink of face. It's possible, too, that he has a headache. Last night he launched *The Purple Revolution* at – yes – a Westminster pub. Is he hungover? "It was a great evening," he says, ignoring the question. "Normally people hang around for the speech, then they go. But yesterday everyone stayed on." Soon after this, he turns to Kassam and croaks: "Could I possibly have some more water, Raheem?"

Even by his standards – Farage goes to bed at midnight and rises at the crack of dawn, seven days a week – the last few days have been relentless. The newspaper serialisation of his book threw up several controversies, plus there was the fallout from a Channel 4 documentary in which Farage told Trevor Phillips, former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, that UK race discrimination laws should be abolished. Debate, horrified or otherwise, about Ukip policy in the matter of the children of immigrants – Farage has suggested they should not have access to the state education system for five years – rumbled on, as did his latest comments about Muslims (he believes they want to form "a fifth column and kill us"). There has been no escape – for him or for us. Even as we talk, another crisis is brewing. He does not yet know it, but Janice Atkinson, the Ukip MEP who was to fight Folkestone and Hythe at the election, will shortly be suspended from the party for "financial irregularities"; Stephen Howd, the party's candidate in Scunthorpe, will stand down while an alleged incident at his workplace is investigated; and Jonathan Stanley, who was to stand in Westmorland and Lonsdale, will resign, having accused Ukip of racism and bullying.

The line people like to take about Farage, particularly those who disagree with him, is that he is a clever, canny operator, one we underestimate at our peril. Certainly Nick Clegg seemed vastly to have underestimated him when he challenged the Ukip leader to a televised head-to-head on Europe last year (Farage was judged the clear winner). But I'm not so sure about this. Even taking into account his >

Constituent parts:
in Thanet South,
where Farage
hopes voters will
make him an MP.
He has said he will
stand down as
Ukip leader if he
doesn't win



A vibrant, high-contrast photograph of two women sitting on a wooden deck by a swimming pool. The woman on the left, with long brown hair, is wearing a gold sequined dress and purple high-heeled shoes, laughing with her head tilted back. The woman on the right, with curly brown hair, is wearing a black top and a gold watch, laughing with her mouth wide open. She is holding a silver can of Diet Coke. The background is a bright, shimmering pool of water. The overall mood is joyful and carefree.

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Friends and foes: (clockwise from above): Zippy, from *Rainbow*; protesters surrounding Farage's car; Kirsten Farage; and with supporters lobbying parliament

tiredness and the fact that he clearly doesn't believe I'm worth an hour of his time, his inability to sustain an argument is astonishing. Little of what he says bears even the slightest scrutiny, for all that he interrupts with alacrity. He reminds me powerfully of Zippy, the ridiculous puppet star of the children's programme *Rainbow*, and thanks to this I soon morph into George, Zippy's hippopotamus companion.

George, you will recall, was gentle, mild-mannered and lightly ironic of tone. Even so, by allowing Zippy simply to burble on, he usually won in the end.

Did the fallout from the conversation he had with Trevor Phillips about discrimination and the law take him by surprise? "Yes, I spat out my tea," he splutters. "I'd forgotten I'd given that interview. But the argument I was making was not: let's abolish these laws. The argument is: there are 5 million small businesses in this country, and 250,000 unemployed youngsters, and I want to give both a better chance. I think there is a strong argument for relaxing them." How would this help? "There should be a strong presumption in favour of nationality. I mean: in favour of UK passports." But what about black Britons? They might find themselves on the receiving end of discrimination, British passports or not. "The example I use is: Poland." So you want employers to choose Britons over Poles? "Yes." And beyond that they can pick their staff according to their own whims and prejudices? "Oh, this is remarkably uncontroversial," he says.

What about excluding the children of migrants from the education system?

Apparently this is still up for debate. "I mean, if someone's coming in and doing a skilled job that's not highly paid, clearly this may be unfair. But if they're working for Goldman Sachs, should we provide their children with an education?" Is he serious? How many highly paid foreign bankers does he know with children at British state schools? His voice rising in exasperation, he makes one of his habitual rhetorical leaps. "The question is: do we think it's reasonable to have uncontrolled numbers of migrants coming into England and bringing their families with them? We're 250,000 primary school places short by 2019."

Looking at his weary face, clammy and puce, it's impossible not to wonder about his promise to stand down as Ukip leader should he fail to win Thanet South at the general election. Before today, I took this announcement as a sign that he believes those polls which put him ahead of the Tories, 11 points clear in one case. But perhaps a part of him is looking for an excuse to quit. There is gossip about his ill health (though when I ask if he is in pain – his back has hurt ever since the famous plane crash of 2010 – he says not: "It would hurt if I'd been in the car

“”
This is the most eclectic political party in Britain. We had goths, we had people in turbans

for eight hours, as I often am, but today it's OK.") So which is it? Is he secretly hoping to fail? "I said the same last year about the European elections: that if we didn't win I'd stand down. You could say that I keep playing double or quits." How would he feel if his political career came to an end in five weeks' time? "It would be wonderful! I'd have my life back. I could get a proper job." A pause, during which he grins at me determinedly. "I'm being a bit flippant," he says when I don't grin back.

It used to be Farage's proudest boast that it was impossible to professionalise the Kippers, but as the election approaches, professionalism is, he must admit, at something of a premium. "It's the biggest dilemma for me, isn't it? I want people to speak freely, but I've got to create a party that succeeds." Does he believe Ukip still has a problem with what David Cameron called fruitcakes, nutters and closet racists? Watching a recent documentary about its activities in Thanet, it seemed that it might. "Yes. Yes, we do. But we also get more scrutiny than other parties. Two weeks ago, a [former] Labour party agent was sent to prison for sex crimes. Did you read about that? No, you didn't. But my people get on the front page for saying something vile at 11 o'clock at night on Facebook. We need a sense of perspective. This is what the establishment is trying to do to us. They've turned a percentage of the population into actively hating us."

What, then, does he make of the rank and file, five weeks before a general election? Is he confident, as they prepare to launch themselves on our doorsteps? He waves an arm. "I looked at them at Margate [during Ukip's spring conference], and I thought: crikey, this is the most eclectic political party in Britain." Could he describe them? "We had goths, we had people in turbans..." His voice trails off. And does he think this, er, diversity reflects the success of Ukip policies, or are these merely people who have nowhere else to go? For the first time today, he sounds almost enthusiastic. "No!" he yelps. "These people actually believe in it!"

THE PURPLE REVOLUTION is subtitled *The Year That Changed Everything* – a reference to 2014, in which Ukip gained its first MPs following the defection of Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless from the Conservatives, and came within a whisker of taking Heywood and Middleton from Labour. ("Another 30 votes and Ed would have gone," says Farage. "I think they would have booted him out.") For Ukip's leader, these events were thrilling: after the count in Clacton, Carswell's constituency, his exhilaration was so great he leapt over the bar at the pub where the Kippers had gathered to celebrate. But on the page he struggles to >





convince the reader of their wider significance. Partly this may be to do with hindsight: Clacton and Rochester seem now to represent Ukip's high-water mark. Mostly, however, it's the result of Farage's Pooter-ish idiom, in which the banal and the overblown collide to unintentionally comic effect. "In this proud Anglo-Saxon town, something amazing had happened," he writes of Clacton. "The Anglo-Saxons had a view of life – that it is a bird that flies from the darkness into the warmth and community of the mead hall, then back into the blackness. That night in Clacton... Ukip was finally alive. We were flying into the mead hall."

The book takes in his love for his "political doppelganger" Rand Paul, the Republican senator and Tea Party supporter, and his loathing of, among others, Baroness Ashton, the EU's former High Representative for Foreign Affairs ("She was a woman who had married well. That was it. No talent, no ability, no skills, no experience.") But he also devotes several pages to the virtues of his beloved school, Dulwich College; to his passion for Keith Joseph, the Thatcherite who first stirred his political instincts; to his time as a metals trader in the City; to the testicular cancer he suffered in his 20s; and, above all, to his fondness for a long lunch.

In his City days, the Farage lunch was known as the "12 till 12", a tradition he is unwilling to give up without a fight. In America to meet Rand Paul, he is appalled to be told, come one o'clock, that sandwiches have been ordered: "My feelings fell somewhere between panic and indignation," he writes. In the end he, Raheem and another colleague, Matt, had no choice but to bolt to a steakhouse. "Matt had a 27oz burger with a stack of onion rings – halfway through he began to sweat profusely. It was a corker lunch."

Though Farage is much given to pointing out the corruption and laziness he believes is widespread in politics, he doesn't think twice about providing such insights. "I work a bloody long day,

**'I work a bloody long day, and if I can go out and have a glass of wine and a good laugh, then I will':
Nigel Farage**

and if I can go out and have a glass of wine and a good laugh, then I will." His rejection of the new puritanism, he says, marks him out from most politicians, as does his absolute refusal to wheel out his family (he has four children, grown-up sons from his first marriage, and two teenage daughters by his German second wife, Kirsten). "What's my kitchen like? I'm not telling you. I won't even let you through the front gate. Whatever my faults, I have some principles. It's selfish, politics, and everyone around you suffers because of it." Does his family suffer? "Of course. The lack of a normal family life, because there can't be one and... even going into the shops and putting your credit card on the counter is potentially a danger [for our family], because our name is very unusual."

Do his sons share his views? "I've no idea, and if I did, I wouldn't tell you." It's fascinating that he is married to a German. "Why? I've no idea what you're talking about." He is cross. "You don't get it, do you? Seriously, it worries me that so few of you understand what we're saying." Oh, I understand. But what I want to know is: has Kirsten ever asked him to tone down his xenophobia? "She is the type of migrant who would pass the Australian-style points system we want to bring in," he says, which isn't really much of an answer at all.

Does it matter to him what people think? Does it bother him, for instance, that I consider some of his views racist? "This is interesting. The only people who think we're racist are white. The black community is incredibly friendly. It bothers me, yes, that you've been driven to think that, because it's unjust. Clearly you don't understand me. I can tell you don't get where I am coming from."

Actually, I say, I think he's the one who doesn't understand me. I grew up with men like him; they patronised the Sheffield pub where I worked as a barmaid, and I thought about them at the age of 19 what I think about him now, which is that a lot of their political opinions were born of insecurity. An indignant snort. "If I was insecure, I don't >

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who think we're
racist are white. The
black community is
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AND THE ONE YOU LIVE.

think I would have given up a good career to go into politics, do you? Would I have joined a party with 250 members and no prospects?" Perhaps, I say. After all, isn't it better to be a big fish in a small pond?

HIS NEW BOOK skates over his childhood, but ask Farage about it, and suddenly he is unable to meet your eye. He was born in Downe, near Sevenoaks, the Kent village where he still lives (and where, last Sunday, his lunch was ruined when protestors invaded the pub where he and his family were eating). His father worked in the City; his mother was a housewife. They divorced when he was six.

"It was an up-and-down childhood," he says, "which in those days was unusual. I can distinctly remember being the only boy in my class whose parents had separated." Did his father leave for another woman? "He had his own problems." (His father, it has been reported, was an alcoholic.) Is this why Farage is so attached to the idea of school, because it provided the stability he was missing at home? "No, no, no! I didn't have a rotten time of it. I lived in a nice village on the Kentish downs. I had tremendous freedom. My brother and I would go out for the day, tuppence in our pockets, to collect things." Like what? "Nuts, mushrooms, you name it..." He seems to be scratching round for something. "And, of course, we'd shoot. Kids had air rifles in those days." Did his mother remarry? "Yes." Did he work? "Not until much later." He coughs, awkwardly. "You may have seen charity calendars

'Ukip really started to motor at the end of 2011, and it has been nonstop ever since': Farage in the European parliament, after being made an MEP in 1999



“You don't get it, do you? Seriously, it worries me that so few of you understand what we're saying

of her, half-naked. She's quite a character." No, I say, I haven't. He looks disbelieving.

He loved Dulwich College, and no wonder; it's a good school, though he did not distinguish himself at A-level (a teacher told him he should be an auctioneer, which sounds about right). However, some of his claims about it are on the outlandish side, particularly his insistence that thanks to its amazing social mix, he is more able to talk to working-class people than most other politicians. "Well, 50% of boys were on assisted places," he says. "One had a father who was a coal merchant." Ah, yes. Farage is obsessed with this fellow, a man who, according to his book, hailed from Penge; in his imagination, coal merchants inhabit an underclass all of their own.

But then, personal experience is all to Farage; it's on such anecdotes that his policies are based. For instance: the cancer that the NHS failed to diagnose correctly when, almost 30 years ago, he presented himself with a testicle as "large as a lemon, and rock hard". Thanks to this, and the treatment he received for the injuries he sustained in the plane crash, it should be perfectly obvious that he is "better qualified to criticise and defend the NHS than most politicians". I tell him that although I was treated for a skin-cancer scare within three weeks, I don't sail along thinking there is no need for NHS reform. So why should it work the other round? Why should a single bad experience dictate his view of a vast system? It's foolish to extrapolate from isolated incidents. But he seems not to have an answer to this. "Every family has three or four good stories and one bad one," he mutters. OK then. >

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Let’s extend this storytime policy initiative to immigration. What does he say to those whose experience has taught them to favour hard-working Polish builders over their British counterparts? “Blair started this!” he shouts. “The metropolitan dialogue that says British builders are useless, lazy, fat and crooked!”

It is impossible to believe that Farage is only a few years older than me. He seems to belong to another generation entirely, another world, even. Was he always like this? He smiles proudly. “I don’t think I’ve changed at all.” Did he like punk? “Nah!” What music did he like? “None.” What does he like now? Is it Elgar’s *Nimrod* all the way? “I don’t listen to music, I don’t watch television, I don’t read.” So he’s exactly the kind of political robot he purports to despise? “No. My hobbies haven’t gone away. When I’m finished with politics, I’ll have a richer life. I’d like to go to the theatre.” To see what? “Everything from Chekhov to... contemporary stuff.”

In the moments before he leaves – a shiny black four-wheel drive will whisk him off, leaving me on the pavement listening to the rush of the traffic – I try to get him to talk about his fierce attachment to the past. At first he resists. “I’ll tell you what’s in its death throes, that’s the European parliament,” he says, launching the case for his own modernism. But in the end he can’t resist. The lure of a prelapsarian Britain conjured from – I’m only guessing – boys’ annuals and Ealing comedies is too strong. Yes, he would like to see the return of matrons in hospitals and grammar schools. Terraces at football grounds? He shakes his head. Not his game. An overturn of the smoking ban? In pubs with well-ventilated separate rooms, certainly. What about greyhound racing? Why doesn’t Ukip support this beleaguered British sport? At last, his eyes light up. “Now that would be an idea. A night at the dogs.” The laugh is loud, but something in his distant gaze tells me that he’s only half joking. ■

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changed at all’: in
the Eastleigh by-
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The hardest start

For young mothers from chaotic and troubled backgrounds, coping with motherhood is incredibly tough. Yvonne Roberts reports on the innovative programme that helps them grow from teens into mothers

Photograph **Alex Lake**





Noon on a cold winter's day in Manchester, and Emma, 19, sits deep in an armchair. She is dressed in a number of layers including her pyjamas, clutching a hot-water bottle in an effort to keep warm. The small terraced house, sparsely furnished, is colder inside than out. On the television *The Real Housewives of New York* spills out affluence. Upstairs, having her daily nap, is Tia, aged 10 months. Emma [not her real name] receives £145 a week in benefits – £45 of which goes to pay off debts for a mobile phone and clothing. So heating is a luxury.

Emma is in college, studying hard, and has ambitions to be a social worker. She is organised, calm and, in spite of what looks like insuperable odds, she is defying the negative stereotypes usually associated with teenage mothers. "I used to be in a bad place," she says. "But not any more. I know where I'm going now." Emma was in care for several years, attended a number of schools, spent time in a pupil referral unit for disruptive behaviour, and by 15 had a problem with alcohol. "My friend used to smash the bottle so I couldn't drink any more," she says. "I hardly bother at all now. That wouldn't help Tia."

The reasons for this positive turn in Emma's life include her own resilience and the support of Dawn – the leaving care social worker – and, especially, Claire Reece, a former paediatric nurse and health visitor employed by the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP). The FNP is a voluntary programme offered to all first-time mothers under 20 (along with the dads) in England. A specially trained nurse visits regularly – 64 visits at a mother's home – from pregnancy until the child is two. The aim is to ensure a healthy pregnancy, improve a child's development and support a young woman to plan for the future and fulfil her aspirations.

The chemistry between the nurse and the teenager is crucial. The nurse encourages a young mother to exercise her own judgment and develop self-confidence – not easy for a person who may have been raised with the message that she is worth little. Ask Claire Reece what family nurses need most of all and she says: "Tenacity – and a love of young people. Humour helps, too." Young women who themselves have been let down and rejected often do their best to push away the family nurse. "You have to treat 'Fuck off!' as a term of endearment," remarks one family nurse drily.

A family nurse, over the weeks, teaches about pregnancy and child development >

'If he's happy then I'm happy': Leah, 19, with her son Layton

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as well as working with a teenager on her self-development through practical support and encouragement. The nurse and teenager together tackle, for instance, housing problems, acquiring furniture, finding baby clothes, sorting benefits, organising repayment of debts, arranging college courses, setting goals – but without crossing the line into unconditional friendship. Child protection is a prime concern, and young mothers are told that the safety of a baby or a toddler comes first. “But if there is a child-protection conference and we know a mum can manage, we say so,” says Claire. “In that respect we carry a lot of risk.”

In America the programme is called the Nurse Family Partnership. Professor David Olds, a developmental psychologist, established it in 1977, and is still in charge, based at the University of Colorado. Three major evaluations over 40 years have demonstrated not only startling success – and a huge saving to the taxpayer – but how much teenage parents with the right kind of support can achieve. This is in spite of challenges such as physical and mental ill health, poverty, homelessness and violent relationships. “The first pregnancy delivers a powerful motivation for a teenager to make a fresh start,” says Ailsa Swarbrick, director of the FNP national unit based in London.

My meeting with Emma is the first time a journalist has had extended access to observe how the FNP works. Over three months I visited teams in Manchester and Portsmouth, and the young women who are the FNP clients, to witness how this extraordinary intervention achieves little short of miracles. In Manchester Claire sits on the sofa next to Emma, a life-size doll on her lap, and a bag of leaflets, sheets of papers, toys and paraphernalia in a large bag at her feet. Claire, who fizzles with energy, began to visit Emma halfway through her pregnancy. If all goes well, in 14 months, when Tia is two, Emma will “graduate” with a testimonial and a celebration. “What’s really powerful is reiterating to the mum how far they’ve come,” Claire says. “What many of them achieve is phenomenal.”

Emma has said that she is fed up with Tia being so clingy and tearful whenever she leaves the room: “It’s getting on my nerves.” Claire begins to play peek-a-boo with the doll on her knee. She uses the doll to unravel a few of the mysteries of early attachment. “Around nine or 10 months, babies need to have you near them. Why do you reckon that is?” Claire

asks chattily. “She needs me because she can’t do anything herself?” Emma suggests.

“Right! Very good. Tia thinks if you are out of the room, who’s going to feed her? So she screams until you come back. Peek-a-boo helps her to learn that even if she can’t see Mum, Mum will always look after her. She feels safe. What do you reckon to that?” Emma’s face lights up with pleasure. It’s a poignant moment, because later I learn that by the age of seven she was caring for her three younger siblings while her mother and older sister and brother partied and took drugs. “I made the little ones cheese on toast, got the baby a bottle and that,” Emma says. “The house was always full of strangers and mess. It was horrible.”

During the hour, Emma also discusses practical problems with Claire. She says she has lost the fob for the gas meter but she’s already applied for a new one. “That’s very good,” Claire says. Even when the gas isn’t being used, Emma has to pay a charge. That’s tough on a minimum income.

Sam, Emma’s boyfriend and the father of Tia, in his 20s, visits often but contributes little financially. She and Claire discuss the next step in trying to get Emma into social housing that won’t stretch the budget so tight – and to provide proper heating. “When we say good-bye at the end of the programme we want our clients to know how to sort out issues for themselves,” Claire says, “and to know where to go for the right kind of help.”

“I used to sit and sulk when Claire visited at first. I was really suspicious,” Emma says. “But it’s helped me a lot. Now I know that I’m the one in the family who is going to do all right.”

IN THE 1970S David Olds worked with three- and four-year-olds with multiple problems in a day-care centre in New York. He concluded that some children were so troubled that by the age of four it was already too late to make a difference. Nearly 50% of a child’s learning may occur in the first four years of life. By kindergarten, a child from a disadvantaged family could have heard 32 million words less than a classmate from a professional family. In addition we have gradually become more aware of the negative impact of violence, >

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By the age of seven she was caring for her three younger siblings. ‘The house was always full of strangers and mess’



Playing and learning:
family nurse Claire
Reece with Emma and
her daughter Tia



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alcohol and drugs on the unborn baby's brain. Some young mothers themselves suffer from alcohol foetal syndrome, and as a result when they are adults they find it difficult to concentrate; academic ability is low and the self-regulation we acquire as we mature proves elusive. For a baby, that might mean a mother feeds only half a bottle before moving on distractedly to another activity and routines are difficult to establish.

In the US, the Nurse Family Partnership has had success with diverse urban and rural populations including white, Hispanic and African-American. Babies have been followed through to their teens and beyond, along with their mothers. The results are outstanding. They include, for instance, a 50% reduction in language delay at 21 months (compared with non-FNP programme children with similar backgrounds); a 67% reduction in behavioural and emotional problems and improved academic achievement at the age of six; a 67% reduction in 12-year-olds use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana; a 28% reduction in anxiety and depression in 12-year-olds; and a 59% reduction in arrests by the time the child is aged 15. Mothers do well, too: less smoking in pregnancy and more breastfeeding; greater maternal employment; reductions in the use of welfare and other state assistance; fewer subsequent pregnancies. Among the strongest gains are the prevention of child abuse, neglect and a reduction in childhood injury.

IN MANCHESTER, TWO teams led by Sheila Panton and Vanda Wellock explain some of the inherited attitudes to child-rearing that they need to find imaginative ways to correct. Ninety per cent of mothers stick with the programme. In pregnancy, a young woman is encouraged to write down positive thoughts about her unborn baby, and sing or play music to him or her. "We get a bit more rap than Mozart," says one family nurse. "But when the baby recognises a tune after it's born, the girls are delighted." The nurses also gently bust popular myths: "An eight-month-old can be potty trained"; "He's crying to wind me up"; "Babies love telly."

The family nurses teach how to read baby cues and the value of getting down on the floor to play. "What we are not is the breastfeeding police," Claire says. "That won't work. If a young woman prefers to feed her baby with a bottle, we explore that idea together

and support the decision she comes to."

Sheila Panton says young women are "remarkably forthcoming" about smoking in pregnancy, drugs, alcohol and sexual behaviour – but they are much more reticent on the issue of domestic violence. "Sometimes it's because they don't recognise a boyfriend's behaviour as abuse," she points out. Marie Livesley, formerly a specialist health visitor in HMP Styal, says: "Abuse is sometimes seen as love."

In Portsmouth, the Family Nurse Partnership was established in 2011, so it has just seen its first group of teenage mothers graduate. The office is garlanded with thank-you cards. Around 160 first-time mothers are eligible for the programme, and the youngest client is 13. Enthusiastic Mia Wren, 48, a former nurse and health visitor for 30 years, heads the family nurse team. Family nurses come from professions such as community nursing, midwifery and health visiting. They undergo intensive training, refresher courses and weekly supervision and have meetings to

discuss safeguarding issues. While the rate of teenage pregnancy in the UK has plummeted to its lowest level since 1969, Portsmouth currently has triple the national rate of pregnancies of girls aged 14 and under.

Mia tells me about Sarah [not her real name]. Aged 15, she was living in the garden shed of her mother's friend. Sarah was pregnant with twins and diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Her father had hanged himself when she was nine, and her mother, a prostitute, had died of an Aids-related disease when Sarah was 13. She had been in and out of care. Sarah had a badly scarred face from a dog bite and her boyfriend, a user of drugs, was in prison.

"Two years on, Sarah has done beautifully," Mia says. "She had twin girls; she breastfed. She dumped the boyfriend. She had her scars fixed, so her self-esteem has risen, she is at college and has a part-time job and her own tenancy. Her two little girls are doing so well. We tell our girls again and again: 'You can be different if you choose to be.'"

Jacquie Nurse, 47, a health visitor and midwife for 16 years before joining FNP, is quietly spoken but brims over with innovative ideas. She raids charity shops for props – a road >

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In pregnancy, a young woman is encouraged to play music to the baby. ‘We get a bit more rap than Mozart’



Teamwork: Mia Wren (left), who heads the team at Portsmouth, with colleague Jacquie Nurse

map painted on an old pillowcase, for instance, with toy cars and bricks illustrating the road-blocks to a baby's learning.

Jacquie has been visiting Leah for 21 months. Leah is 19 and was at college throughout her pregnancy, earning a merit in her BTEC. Her son, Layton, was born by Caesarean section, weighing 9lb 3 oz. Leah is living with her disabled boyfriend Ben, 24, who has no job and is Layton's dad.

Unlike many mothers, Leah has the strong support of her parents, although her mum, Janice, didn't speak to Leah for a week after being told the news. "But we wouldn't be without him now," Janice adds, smiling at Layton, an inquisitive, happy boy.

"I was horrible growing up," Leah says. "The child from hell. I was always out, drinking under age." Her midwife referred Leah to Jacquie. "I was a worrier, and Jacquie has been brilliant," she says. "I text her all the time. I had postnatal depression. I'd see my friends on Facebook going out. I shouldn't say it, but it was a struggle. I'm a young girl. I need a life, too." Jacquie helped with GP appointments and medication. At the time the couple's income was erratic. Now Leah has a job in B&Q and works 16 hours a week.

A few weeks later, when Jacquie and I make a second visit, life has changed, as it often does with teenage mothers. Leah and Ben have split up. Leah is living with her parents, sharing a room with Layton. "He's had his own room since he was six months old, but now he's with me again," she says, upset that her son's routine is disturbed. The cap on housing benefit means that she can't afford a two-bedroom flat. But Leah tells me that she now likes the job at B&Q. "It helps my confidence," she says. She plans to go to college, become a prison officer, move to the Isle of Wight for work.

Jacquie chats to Leah about reading to Layton. "I don't do it a lot," Leah says. "I don't see the point; he doesn't understand." Over the

next 20 minutes Jacquie runs through the value of turning off the telly and looking at picture books to promote language, share sounds and rhymes, and prepare a toddler for bed. "I used to love being read to," Leah concedes. "I will try. If Layton's happy then I'm happy and Jacquie is happy, so we're all happy," she says.

Jacquie takes me to meet Alice Roses, with her aubergine hair, tattoos and shy, warm smile. She became pregnant with Daxton, now 10 months old, when she was 16. Daxton's father said he had been in a bit of trouble for street crime. When he appeared in court it emerged he had 46 convictions. He was in prison during much of Alice's pregnancy. "He missed all the scans, everything," Alice is in a new relationship now. He treats the baby and Alice well. Alice laughs. "Jacquie came here at 9am one day and the first thing she talked about is contraception and have I asked my new boyfriend if he's had a test for STDs – at 9am!" "And she did ask," Jacquie says approvingly. Alice nods: "I wouldn't have had the confidence to do that a few months ago."

Alice is an only child. Both parents have had mental-health issues since she was very young. Her father, Pete, suffers from schizophrenia, initially triggered by drug use, and he is bipolar. Alice's mother, Holly, made several suicide attempts. "But I've been better for quite a while now," Holly says, doting on her grandson. Alice suffered from depression, anxiety and had poor school attendance. She was in care and had several foster placements as well as living with relatives for a time. During her pregnancy, Alice was again moved several times in foster care and into a hostel. A family nurse provides the constancy often missing in the usual support system provided.

For instance, one teenage mother and her baby, both of them on the child-protection register, were allocated seven social workers in six months. "So much that we achieve is about trust," Jacquie says. "Alice is doing beautifully."

"When all the professionals were telling us what we could and couldn't do," says grandmother Holly, "Jacquie was the only one who asked if we were OK." Alice aims to go to college and become a beautician. "Before Daxton was born, I was scared I wouldn't be able to give him good attachment," she says. "Then I saw him and thought: Wow – he's my baby!"

IT COSTS AROUND £3,000 a year for each young woman in the FNP. This month the scheme expands to 16,000 places, meeting 25% of the need from first-time teenage mothers. In

October funding for the FNP will transfer from the NHS to local authorities. Funding isn't ring-fenced, so there are concerns about cuts. Mia Wren offers the sums. If five emergency hospital admissions for a child are avoided as

a result of FNP, £3,750 is saved. If five children no longer have to go into foster care, the savings are £135,000 a year.

For my final visit, I return with Claire to see Emma in Manchester. Tia wakes from her nap and comes to say hello. "She's really bright," Emma says proudly of her daughter. She talks a little more about her own upbringing. Her mother, Vicky, stopped drinking when she met her new partner, then moved the family away from drug dealers, but the children stopped going to school. "She was sorting things out," Emma says. "Then early one morning, the police and social workers all piled into the house. It was horrible; we were screaming. The neighbours saw it all. They took us children away." Intervention has come at a price. One brother is in prison, a sister is in secure accommodation, another lives with her stepfather; a fourth sibling is "off on one", and there is Emma.

"My mum's a workaholic now," Emma says. "She never drinks. She has two jobs. She hasn't celebrated Christmas since they took her children away. They should have given her a chance to put things right."

A history of suspicion and hostility towards social services makes the relationship that Claire has forged with Emma all the more remarkable. "Your college tutor told me you're doing really well," Claire tells Emma. It's hard to tell who is the prouder of the two. ■

“I’d see friends on Facebook going out. I shouldn’t say it, but it was a struggle. I’m a young girl – I need a life



'I was a worrier, and my family nurse has been brilliant': Leah plans to go to college and become a prison officer

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Keiran O'Nightley, off-season queen

A short
story by
Rupert
Everett

'We pass under the Rialto
Bridge and someone shouts.
"Hi, queen!" Am I being
recognised?': Rupert Everett,
as Keiran O'Nightley, inside
a church in Venice



he long-toothed matinee idol – that lesser-spotted show-business queen Keiran O’Nightley – has developed a tendency to shun the world. (She met everyone and they all turned out to be the same person. She got bored with the person.) Unfortunately she has developed a fixed taste for the good life, but the tiny principality of show business in which she is still crown princess produces a spiral of diminishing returns and so she has taken to skulking around the world off-season. When everyone else is busy doing fabulous things, taking the kiddies back to school, going to Clouds for a winter top up or simply churning out one fabulous film after another she is on the night train to Venice with a picnic from Fouquet’s and a Tramadol. With a mélange of judicious timing and casual name dropping she has learnt over the years to score remarkable deals at the best hotels. This January she has set her sights on the flat black Adriatic.

THE AFTERNOON BEFORE I leave – it’s early in January and the Charlie Hebdo massacre happened this morning – I am plodding down Frith Street, Soho, with a heavy heart and I notice that the coffee shop on the corner of Old Compton Street has closed down.

There is a note on the door. “Susie says goodbye and happy 2015” it says in sweet, swirly letters. She continues in neat block capitals: “After 25 years my lease is not being renewed. I would like to thank all my customers for their loyalty and support throughout those years – the good and bad times we all shared. Soho is not the hub of characters it once was. However it is onwards and upwards for all of us. I am sure our paths will cross again. Saying goodbye would be too hard and bittersweet. Love Susie.”

I read it twice, standing there in the rain as people rush by. This is how dementia begins. Frozen in front of some inexplicable piece of bad news, unable to make the next move. But that’s Soho for you. Here today, gone tomorrow, mourned only by a few remaining ghouls shuffling past Susie’s in the rain on a January night. We are in the hands of extremists – at home and abroad.

It seems apt somehow to be going to Venice, the wedding cake of wedding cakes, a Disneyworld cleared of all Susies, and perhaps the metaphor for our own sinking Europe. I travel from London to Paris on a

Eurostar bristling with policemen – where I must pause for a moment to celebrate one of the most amazing bottoms I have seen in years. Am I allowed to do this, I wonder, or am I being reductive, racist and sexist? It is the bottom of a glorious muscle-bound attendant. He is sweet and slightly sissy with a delicious cockney French accent and eyes in the back of his head. (You’d need them with an arse like that!) Like Marilyn he seems to have been sewn into his uniform. His trousers strain at the seams. They can hardly contain these flexing cheeks and my seat can hardly contain me as I topple out time and again watching him striding up and down the aisle. In the old days I would probably have hung out by the toilets in the hope of joining the mile-low club. Now I’d rather the complete works of Jean Rhys sitting on my lap.

Paris slides by wet and deserted, street lights and traffic lights glittering in the rain. I stop off at Fouquet’s and continue to the Gare de Lyon where I catch the night train to Venice. It’s called the Thello and is revolting – worse than any train I have ever taken in India, Africa or even England. Luckily I have brought my own picnic because the restaurant car – an old custard-coloured carriage from the eastern block

– only serves a hepatoid jellyfish masquerading as pizza. The girl behind the bar looks as though she has just graduated from reform school. The train breaks down for

That sinking feeling: on the colourful island of Burano and, right, the majestic Grand Canal





“
As my water taxi enters
the Grand Canal the
scent of salt and diesel
with its bottom note of
sewage is delicious

long periods, dripping and hissing in a siding near Chambéry as the heating fails and the loos block up. (Suddenly I'm at school, mountains of piss-soaked paper topped with dollops of you-know-what.) But spirits rise and we limp into Santa Lucia late the next afternoon as dusk falls in coral smears over the lagoon.

Venice is deserted from 5 January until Carnival. St Mark's Square is a vast drained swimming pool in need of a good scrub. Empty gondolas bob about on the canals like rows of open coffins. Beady boatmen keep a lookout for winter trade from the nearby bars. The big bells boom from the pointed towers, reverberating through the night as my water taxi takes me round that amazing corner under the antique lamp that swings in the breeze and twinkles on the water to the Grand Canal – shrouded in mist – one of the most heartstopping sights in the world. There is an icy breeze, but I stand erect at the back of the boat and we bounce about in the wake of a passing tugboat. The scent of salt and diesel with its bottom note of sewage is delicious. We pass under the Rialto Bridge and someone shouts. “Hi, queen!” Am I being recognised? This is an increasingly rare occurrence nowadays and I am unsure how to react. I look round. Yes. “Ciao Keiran!” screams a chubby Italian, waving.

How delightful. Should I jump into the water and swim over to thank him personally or should I snootily look away? I settle on a regal wave. The boatman observes

through eyes like slits. Another 20 on the bill.

The Gritti Palace is one of the best hotels in the world. Actually I think it could be the best. It remains luxurious and discreet – an almost impossible combination these days. It is quite small and beautifully furnished like the inside of a jewellery box in gilt and glass, damask and marble. Unlike most of the grand hotels it has survived the obligatory refurbishment with its dignity intact. The staff is from the old school, with brilliant manners, neither obsequious nor aloof. The concierge remembers the first time I came to the hotel in 1983. “You haven't changed,” he lies sweetly, winking. Actually I look as if I had spent the night in prison.

On the other hand I have negotiated a rather generous deal for a single room looking over the square, so imagine my delight as I am shown to the most expensive suite in the hotel. In the game of snakes and ladders I have thrown double sixes. “Since you are writing your book,” says the assistant manager, throwing open a door on the first floor of the palazzo “we thought you might like to stay in our Somerset Maugham suite.” I grovel like a rabid Pekinese and immediately decide to stay for an extra week.

Two high coral and cream rooms hung with elaborate chandeliers look out over the Grand Canal through pointed windows. During the day the sunlight bounces off the water and shimmers on the ceiling, and the chandeliers gleam. The room trembles with life and that is one of the strange things about Venice. The

place sometimes feels more alive than the people, the past more vivid than the present.

The bath is a foamy sarcophagus and I feel strangely immortal lying there for an hour listening to the noises of the canal – the vaporetto grinding through its gears, the water slapping and gurgling against the walls of the hotel and the odd snatch of “O Sole Mio” from a half-hearted tenor with an accordion on a cluster of gondolas crammed with Chinese tourists moving in slow motion along the canal.

The bar downstairs is empty. Once you have got used to being alone in a hotel there is no going back and each new arrival is viewed with undisguised horror. I sit in splendid isolation in that hall of mirrors, just the barman in one corner, me in the other and all the ghosts in between – Garbo and Gershwin, Coward and Cocteau – all trapped and watching through the glass walls.

In the old days the Giglio gondola rank was a little cruisy. Not any more. There is a little wooden cottage where the gondoliers stand about, grumpy and flubby in their striped shirts and straw hats, making noises like primates – oyee, owoo – at their colleagues on passing boats. They show little enthusiasm as they haul the tourists on to their gondolas and less when I ask how much it would cost to do some pictures (for this article) with a good-looking punter. (I fancy a *Madonna-Like-a-Virgin* moment.) My offer doesn't go down very well. The old gondoliers strut around indignantly >

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– oyee, owoo – then come up with an insane price. (Probably the good-looking gondolier is living in Las Vegas and has to be flown over.)

Harry's Bar is the first port of call for all visitors to Venice with enough money but less imagination, and tonight is the last time I shall ever go there. It is unchanged since the 1920s – except for the price. You are neatly fleeced from the moment you walk through the door. On the other hand the waiters here are much better than the gondoliers. They are charm personified.

The bar itself is placed right by the door so the first thing you see is the handsome barman beaming at you and proposing a cocktail. "Americano, Negroni, Bellini?" Kerching. With a drink in your hand you are handed along the line by another pristine and smiling waiter towards "your special table" and soon you are gushing superlatives and ordering everything on the menu. The place is brightly lit (concentration-camp tactics). The waiters all wear white jackets, bow ties and black trousers. They look marvellous clustered in groups by the bar against the canary-silk walls.

The place is small, intimate, a throwback to a gentler time – you think – until you realise the pasta you ordered costs nearly €50. Not only that, but when it comes there are only about 30 strands of spaghetti on the plate. Your salad is gone in three chomps. Just in case the spell is broken Mr Cipriani himself is wheeled in from the freezer – ancient and pristine in a dark suit and white hair. He reminds me of Mr Visconti – the war criminal from *Travels with My Aunt*. He leans politely over every table shaking hands and finger fucking us all into submission. The bill for pasta and salad is €160. Thank God polly pound is strong.

I stay in my room in the morning trying to work, sitting at Somerset Maugham's desk – but he isn't being enormously helpful. I don't think he approves of Jean Rhys. I stare at the busy canal, vague and directionless. A weird lethargy sets in. I stumble out to wander the city, down the streets where lean illegal boys from Ethiopia and Somalia brace the cold in front of the fashion houses – Gucci and Louis Vuitton, Versace and Prada – selling counterfeit handbags. These bags are spread out on the ground in front of the real thing – a gleaming mirage in the shop window – and the boys stand between them silent, waiting. Relations with the police

“Tell us what you've been in,” he asks. There is nothing worse than being a celebrity who has to trot out his CV



seem to have reached some kind of *entente*. A few years ago they were constantly on the run.

You could see them grabbing their stuff – 300 pairs of shades – and sprinting off. Now they can be seen late at night sauntering home in the mist, strange tall figures – six handbags on each arm – queens who have dropped in from another planet.

I listen to an amazing conversation in a little restaurant near the Rialto called Paradiso, only it isn't so Paradiso tonight. It's a tiny place on a thin, dark side street with a 70-year-old head waiter. I think he must be an aristocrat fallen on hard times. He is incredibly nice and calls me "caro", which is sweet. The place is empty. Just me and an electric fire until an American family arrives and then an English couple from the home counties. He is corpulent in corduroy

trousers and a scrubbed pink face and she is a screechy stick insect and the old man puts them at the table next to the American family who are eager to strike up a conversation. They start off with me. The man catches my eye, we smile at each other and I continue with my book (I am on *Voyage in the Dark*).

"Your face looks ree-alley familiar," he says when I look up.

"I'm Keiran O'Knightley the actor." I reply politely and dive back into Jean.

"Tell us some of the things you have been in." Now there is absolutely nothing worse than being a celebrity who has trot out his own CV. There is literally NO

Water works: mixed fortunes aboard the vaporetto that plies Venice's canal network

glamour. Nevertheless I cheerfully list my credits and they respond to each title with a puzzled shake of their wretched corn-fed heads. It would appear they've seen nothing of my work until I mention that I once wrote a travel book called *Rambles in the Balearics*.

"I love Rambo. Did they make it into a movie?"

"Alas. Not yet."

The English couple observe furiously. Undeterred, the American gentleman turns his attention to them. Introductions are made. Brandi. Ursula. Trett. Jonathan. Common ground is located.

"Je suis Charlie," declares the American, winking and raising a clenched fist.

"Je sniff Charlie." The pink-faced man replies languidly, before barking with laughter. The Americans join in, unsure. The stick insect, Ursula, senses danger.

"Actually I always loathed Charlie Hebdo," says Jonathan.

"Oh really? But don't you love freedom of speech?"

"Not really, no. I suppose you know why it's called *Charlie Hebdo* don't you?"

"No."

"Well, when De Gaulle died they came up with another of those ghastly-unfunny-if-you-ask-me covers and the government stopped them from printing it. So they changed the name of the magazine to *Charlie Hebdo* – after De Gaulle. There's freedom of speech for you. Freedom for who?" He's bellowing now.

"Whom, darling, freedom for whom," corrects the stick insect, nervously.

"Fuck off, darling. My wife is a stickler for grammar," barks Jonathan, splashing wine into his glass.

"Well, we don't want to go to France any more," says the American man.

"Then you absolutely mustn't," agrees Ursula. She's in a Noël Coward play.

"It's become very difficult for Jews": Trett.

"You think it's easy for Muslims?": Jonathan.

The patrician maître d' has collapsed on >

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a chair near the door to the kitchen and makes faces at me. Some more guests arrive – Italians – and the place suddenly feels electric.

“Don’t get me wrong,” continues Jonathan, oblivious. “No one deserves to be shot. Ghastly. But it was bad form doing another cover. That really was pathetic.”

“I completely disagree,” says Trett.

“You would. You lot are the reason we’re in this pickle.”

“Don’t listen to him. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” squawks Ursula.

And it goes on. A communal bottle of wine is ordered. The two men become competitive. “This is just plonk.”

“We like it.”

Ursula and Brandi grow rigid as only good wives can. The Italians murmur.

Jonathan’s face turns purple. He is approaching his John Galliano moment but the maître d’ has other plans and the bill is placed firmly in front of him.

“Oh. Did I ask for that?”

“I did,” snaps Ursula.

In the tiny loo I am accosted by the old waiter, white faced and quivering.

“Signor O’Knightley. *Mi dispiace*. Thees is not good people. Come again tomorrow and we give you something special.”

Drifting round the city I see them from afar on several occasions – the American family walking across St Mark’s Square; Jonathan and Ursula bickering on a passing vaporetto and then again looking for Diaghilev’s grave in the cemetery, dots howling through the tombs. I wave and move on. Venice is a small place and we go round and round in circles. On my last day they are comically wedged between two groups of Chinese tourists on a vaporetto to Burano.

Every day I take this boat. It leaves from the Fondamente Nuove and stops at Murano and Torcello before arriving on the island of many colours with its leaning tower 40 minutes later. There are no palazzos on Burano, just fishermen’s cottages painted in every colour of the rainbow. The tides of tourists come and go like clockwork. They seethe from the vaporetto across this toy town before being sucked back into the lagoon on the next boat.

I plough through the current on my way to lunch at Al Gatto Nero. It’s my favourite restaurant: simple and delicious, pretty and reasonably priced. The



walls are covered with pictures, the windows with pretty lace curtains. Ruggero and his wife Lucia cook while their son Massi runs the show. He speaks perfect English with a Scottish accent. I go there every day. All the fish is fresh and local and so are some of the clients – which is more than can be said for most of the restaurants in Venice.

The vaporetto is the best part of being in Venice. (Forget walking around endless freezing churches. No message. They all look better from the window of a passing boat.) I love watching the sailors as they casually dock, talking to their girlfriends on their phones while slinging ropes over bollards with easy grace and precision. The engine grinds into reverse and the boat strains and groans into the station with a final clunk of contact.

“**I sit in the bar alone, all the ghosts – Garbo and Gershwin, Coward and Cocteau – watching through the glass walls**”



Pillow talk: luxuriating at the Gritti Palace.

Below: Somerset Maugham’s desk

with another lurch the door slides shut and the vignette is over.

The lagoon is stunning in all weathers. The pale jade water, shallow and flat, turns to white or silver depending on the mood. The wooden stakes that line the route blink in the mist, red and green. On a clear morning the snowy Alps hang over the view, another planet – Nirvana. Looking at it all day after day is mesmerising. Real life, with its soundtrack of screaming sirens and crashing building sites, slowly recedes like a bad dream. In Venice there are only voices and footsteps, waves and boats, oyee and owoo. It’s an expensive therapy, but worth it. When you get home the water laps on for a time in your dreams and you list in your bed as you speed across the lagoon on a gigantic seashell pulled by the American family and the English couple.

On my way to the station I get done on the vaporetto for not having a ticket. It is quite humiliating. Clutching my wheelie suitcase like a paranoid chicken with an enormous egg I am interrogated sharply by the lady collector and quickly lose my nerve. I pretend to look for my ticket and then am forced to admit that I never purchased one. All this observed by the haughty faces of three Venetian dowagers swathed in furs. I am fined and have to pay her €50 on the spot. I wave the note in their nasty faces. “More mink, eh?” I scream.

Oh well, if it helps to stop Venice from sinking, so be it. On the train I try to catch one last look at the lagoon, but all I can see is my own face reflected in the dirty window. Bloating and bleary, lips locked in an eternal frown, raisin eyes straining to see round the remains of Dr Seabagh’s latest Eastern Bloc implants.

“Found drowned,” Jean Rhys would say. I’ve fallen in love with her. She is my patron saint. In her honour I drop a Tramadol and wash it down with wine. I turn out the lights and now I can see the lights twinkle on the lagoon.

The train breaks down at Maestre. ■

Keiran O’Nightley’s diaries, *Fifty Shades of Gay*, are being published by Little Brown Moment shortly

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Caerphilly does it:
smoked haddock tart
and, facing page,
leek, courgette and
Caerphilly tart



Square meals

Layers of soft and creamy filling balanced with crisp and crumbly pastry make these tarts a wonderful weekend supper

There are days when all you want on your plate is softness and gentle flavours. A bowl of porridge, perhaps; a risotto whose grains are bound by homemade chicken stock; soporific macaroni cheese bubbling in its dish. Other days you crave crispness: the crackle of a piece of tempura puffed and blistered from its oil, the sweet crunch of a brandy snap or the flakiness of a puff-pastry tart.

Mostly, I want both. The rough pebble-dash of a crumble crust and the soft sweet fruit underneath or the rustling pastry of a pasty with its filling of lamb and gravy. The contrast of textures makes something that tastes good even better. The real success of a velvety chicken liver pâté is only really obvious when you spread it on a triangle of light, crisp toast.

And so it is with the recipes I have been working on this week. The shattered crust of a well-baked puff-pastry shell, the softness of its filling – of fish and cream or shredded, buttered vegetables – then a final topping of savoury crumble. So we have a leek tart with a final layer of cheese crumble and a fish and potato pie whose top crust is not pastry but made of tarragon-flecked crumbs. Layer after layer, the crisp and the soft, the rough and the smooth.

LEEK, COURGETTE AND CAERPHILLY TART

Makes 2 tarts
and serves 4

puff pastry 325g

courgettes 500g

leeks 400g

butter 70g

flour 4 tbsps

vegetable stock 400ml

Caerphilly cheese 150g

breadcrumbs 25g



Directions

Coarsely grate the courgettes using a large-holed grater. Place in a colander in the sink, sprinkle the surface with salt and set aside for 15-20 minutes to draw the water out.

Discard the root end of each leek and the very thickest of the green leaves (they are good for stock), then cut in half lengthways. Cut each half into long, thin strips then rinse thoroughly under cold running water. I say thoroughly because leeks are

inclined to harbour fine grit and mud among their layers.

Melt the butter in a medium to large pan, add the leeks then 100ml of water, and let the leeks soften over a medium heat. (I put greaseproof paper over the surface and then cover with a lid to help the leeks steam to softness without browning.)

Rinse the courgettes of their salt, squeeze gently dry with your fist, then add them to the leeks. Leave them to cook for 2 or 3 minutes, until they are opaque, then remove from the pan with a draining spoon, leaving the >



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FOOD & DRINK NIGEL SLATER

> buttery liquid behind.

Add the flour to the pan and stir to form a smooth paste, let it cook for a minute or two then stir in the vegetable stock, little by little, until you have a smooth sauce. Bring to the boil then simmer for 5 minutes, stirring regularly, then return the leeks and courgettes. Crumble in 100g of Caerphilly then season with black pepper and a little salt.

Set the oven at 200C/gas mark 6. Roll the pastry out into two rectangles measuring 21cm x 14cm. Score a rectangle inside each, 2cm in from the edges of the pastry without cutting right through, and place them on a nonstick baking tray. Bake for about 12 minutes, until lightly crisp but pale, then remove from the oven. Loosen the central rectangle of pastry along the score lines with a knife and gently ease out the top layer, leaving the base intact.

Divide the filling between the two hollows. Mix the breadcrumbs with the remaining grated cheese then scatter over the surface of each tart. Bake for 20 minutes, until pale gold.

SMOKED HADDOCK TART

You will be left with two squares of pastry from the centre of each tart. May I suggest homemade jam, cream and a little icing sugar?

puff pastry 325g
new potatoes 300g
smoked haddock 450g
double cream 250ml
spring onions 3
parsley a small bunch
egg yolks 2

for the crumble:

plain flour 75g
butter 50g
tarragon leaves small handful

Directions

Cut the potatoes into thick coins, boil until tender in deep, salted water, then drain them. Skin the haddock and cut into short, finger-thick pieces. Finely chop the spring onions. Pour the cream into a saucepan, add the haddock and spring onions with a little salt and pepper and cook for 5 minutes, till almost tender. Lift the fish out of the cream with a draining spoon, then leave the cream to cool. Set the oven at 200C/gas mark 6.

Finely chop the parsley – you need about three heaped tablespoons – and add to the cream. Gently mix in the egg yolks, potatoes and haddock.

Roll the pastry into four squares measuring roughly 14cm x 14cm. Place them on a baking sheet and score a square on each, 2cm in from the rim. Bake the pastries for about 12 minutes, till dry to the touch, then remove them from the oven.

Reduce the flour, butter and tarragon leaves to coarse crumbs, either with a food processor or using your fingertips. Add a tablespoon or so of water and shake the bowl firmly or stir lightly with a fork till you have crumbs of different sizes.

Remove the top layer from the scored central square of the pastries, leaving the base intact. Fill the hollows with the haddock and potato mixture. Scatter the crumble over and return to the oven for about 25 minutes, till the pastry is crisp. ■

“”

Mostly, I want both: the rough pebble-dash of a crumble crust and the soft sweet fruit underneath

Wines of the week

by David Williams



Lot 02 Tasmanian Chardonnay, Australia 2013 (£9.99, Aldi)

Aldi's bid for vinous respectability, an important part of its campaign to lure still more middle-class shoppers into its stores and on to its website, continues with the launch of the Lot Series, a set of "boutique wines" (their wording, not mine), each the result of a collaboration with a "leading" (their wording again) winemaker. Three of them go on sale this week (a fragrant, silky Argentine Malbec-Cabernet will be on sale in May, and there will be five more coming later in the year). The savoury oatmeal and crisp apple of this excellent Tasmanian Chardonnay was the pick of the bunch, just ahead of the piercing, incisive Lot 04 Leyda Sauvignon Blanc from Chile's Leyda Valley located near the Pacific coast just west of the capital, and the chewy sweet fruit and spice of the Lot 03 Pézenas 2013 southern French red.



Toro Loco Tempranillo, Utiel-Requena, Spain 2014 (£3.79, Aldi)

Good as these wines from Aldi are, and while I would be more than happy to put a bottle of any of them in the shopping trolley the next time I'm scavenging the aisles for cheap loo roll and excellent German cold meats and bread, the Lot Series wines would not on their own be enough to make me plot a trip to Aldi. If I had a tenner to spare, I'd still rather go to a high-street indie or a revamped Oddbins where they have an infinitely wider range at that price. What Aldi does have, however, which the indies (and none of the other supermarkets for that matter) don't, is a bargain basement wine of the quality of this Toro Loco Tempranillo. It is a juicy, berry-fruited red wine that is quite astonishingly good considering that tax and other costs leave only a few pence for the wine itself.



The Exquisite Collection Fleurie, Beaujolais, France 2014 (£6.49, Aldi)

As I tasted the rest of the slim Aldi range of 50 bottles amid the distractingly spectacular views of London at the top of Millbank Tower, it seemed to me that price remains the overriding consideration in the retailer's selection process. There was very little that was egregiously bad in the selection, most wines were OK or better for the money, but there was little to stir the soul. There are, however, some real gems to look out for. The Exquisite Collection Fleurie 2014 (£6.49) is a very pretty light Beaujolais; while the zesty limey Exquisite Collection Clare Valley Riesling 2014 and the soft strawberry-juicy Exquisite Collection New Zealand Pinot Noir 2014 (both £6.99) pull off the Aldi trick of being much better than their prices suggest they have any right to be.

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Nigel's midweek dinner

QUICK CHICKEN LAKSA

The recipe

Into a food processor put two small hot red chillies, two roughly chopped inner stalks of lemongrass, two cloves of garlic, the juice of a lime, a handful each of coriander leaves and mint, three teaspoons of turmeric and three tablespoons of groundnut oil. Process to a rough paste.

Warm a griddle pan and cook 500g of boned chicken breast for 5 to 7 minutes on each side, until cooked. Remove from the pan and slice into thick strips.

Warm a deep-sided sauté pan or wok over a moderate heat, then fry the paste for a minute, moving it round the pan so it doesn't burn. Add the pieces of griddled chicken then pour in the contents of a 400ml can of coconut milk and bring to the boil. Shake in a few drops of Thai or Vietnamese fish sauce.

Drop 100g of fine noodles into boiling water, drain and divide among four deep bowls. Ladle in the chicken and its sauce and serve. Enough for 4.

The trick

Organisation is the key here. There are more ingredients than I would usually want to put in a quick, everyday dish, but they require little prep other than roughly chopping and blitzing in a food processor. So have all the ingredients ready before you start. Then the whole thing will only take minutes. You could

cook the chicken using an overhead grill if you prefer.

The twist

Add a thumb of ginger or a teaspoon of dried shrimp to the spice paste, or a handful of Thai basil. The flavour of the griddled chicken is part of the dish, but if you prefer something more soothing, poach it in the coconut milk instead. Use thick fresh noodles if you prefer, or leave them out altogether. ■



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Shining example

Sunday lunch should not be an elegant affair. Nor inventive. Now pass the roast potatoes, would you?

It's time to talk about the really important things, the ones that make a difference. Obviously, I'm referring to the correct way to make cauliflower cheese. More food crimes have been committed in the name of cauliflower cheese than almost any other dish. So let me give you the rules: the cauliflower must be undercooked before being bathed in the sauce and it must be in a single large piece. Failure to do this will result in a mush you could masticate without the aid of teeth. Finally there must be a generous hand on both the cheese and the mustard in the sauce. Got it? Good.

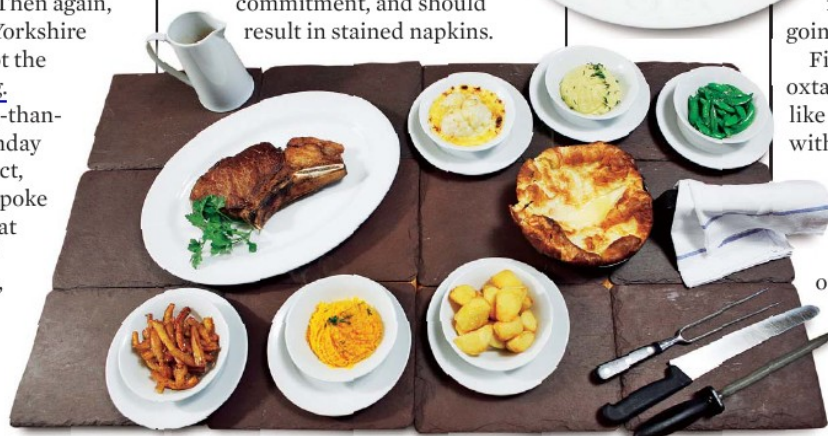
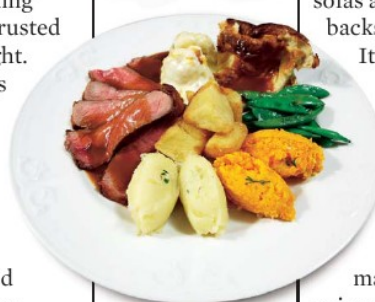
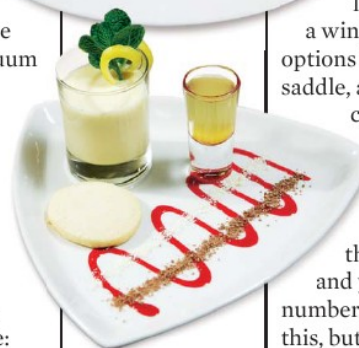
OK. These are things we all know, or should. And yet when faced by dishes like this from the domestic repertoire, so many restaurants get them wrong. Order boudin de volaille à la Richelieu and they're right there. No problem. Ask for a cauliflower cheese and it's the end of days. They try to reinvent a classic which doesn't need it, resulting in a crime that ought to be tried at the Hague.

The kitchen at the Lamplighter Dining Rooms in Windermere does not try to reinvent cauliflower cheese. It makes it just like your gran would make it if your gran could cook, which mine couldn't. (Oh, the terrible things she did to ingredients. And she did them so often.) Then again, bar an issue with their Yorkshire pudding, there's not a lot the Lamplighter gets wrong.

It was, I accept, a less-than-obvious choice for a Sunday lunch in the Lake District, but it was the one that spoke to me. It said: this is what you really want, isn't it? And it was. Lord knows, I'd searched. Cumbria and the Lake District are, these days, blessed with restaurants. The problem is that

they are weighted heavily towards the high-end tourist industry. It has a significant number of country house hotels, with the sort of aesthetic that looks really good in photographs reproduced on heavyweight glossy paper. They're the sort of hotels where they vacuum the backs of the sofas.

I started scanning the menus and my heart fell. Two of the better-known hotels – both of which featured in Coogan and Brydon's *The Trip* – offered soufflé Suisse as a Sunday lunch starter. I didn't think it existed outside of Le Gavroche, and with good reason. It's angina on a plate: eggs, cheese, butter, cheese, eggs and a little more butter whisked up with a dash of self-loathing. Just putting it on a menu is a way of signalling a world view. It says: we vacuum the backs of our sofas. The problem is that places which do that sort of thing cannot, in my experience, be trusted to get a roast Sunday lunch right. A proper Sunday roast lunch is a bit like Woody Allen's joke about sex only being dirty if it's done properly. It should never be about mimsy slices of dainty things positioned just so. It needs heft and commitment, and should result in stained napkins.



The Lamplighter's proposition seemed to offer just that. You order in advance for the whole table: £18.95 per person for roast chicken or roast pork, £22.95 for a roast leg of lamb up to £25.95 for a wing rib of beef (there are other options including stuffed lamb saddle, and toad in the hole; an à la carte menu is also available to be ordered from on the day). This price includes soup and dessert. There are demands. You must order by the Friday before the Sunday and you need to give a credit-card number. Normally I would baulk at all this, but as you could be getting them to buy in a wing rib for six people which they will start cooking a few hours before your arrival it seems entirely fair. Do arrive on time.

The Lamplighters is not a fancy place. It rolls its eyes at fancy. I imagine all its sofas are pushed to the wall so the backs never need vacuuming. It's a large B&B with a basic dining room attached, all sturdy brown-varnished breakfast-room furniture and serviceable carpets and piped music. But your table will be ready, marked by the large number of slate heat mats. That's what matters. You're going to need them.

First there is soup, vegetable or oxtail the day we go, and both taste like the sort you'd knock up at home with a stick blender. This is not a bad thing. And then come the dishes. There is a pert mound of buttery mashed carrot and swede, and a matching one of mashed potato, for mounds as pert as these must come in twos. There are roasties which too often in restaurants are a disappointment and here crunch and gasp in all



Sturdy does it: the restaurant and (facing page, from top) sticky toffee pudding; lemon posset; vegetable soup; the plated feast; and lunch laid out on slate heat mats

The Lamplighter Dining Rooms

High Street, Windermere 01539 443 547 Sunday lunch for two, including drinks and service £70

the right places. There are honey-roasted parsnips that turn out to be the crystal meth of root vegetables, so deep and dark and sweet and crunchy we clean out the bowl in the name of research.

There is that magnificent cauliflower cheese, the surface of the sauce as burnished as a mummy's golden sarcophagus. The Yorkshire arrives, promisingly, in its own black cast-iron pan, as taut and curved as my belly will be if I attempt to finish all these side dishes. It deflates quickly, however, so the stodginess

at the bottom is no surprise. The fat just needed to be hotter when the batter went in.

It doesn't matter. There is a big jug of gravy to send it on its way. Most of all there is the glorious object that is the bone-on rib of beef, delivered tableside, complete with its amber ribbon of fat. Our cheery waiter slices it up and it is, as requested, medium rare. Someone has given this bit of animal some serious attention and care. There is so much of it that we agree my companion's dog will do very well

tonight. There is horseradish cream.

Most of all there is a nostalgic sort of happiness, for this is a Sunday lunch of the sort people of my age claim to remember from childhood, but which I suspect rarely existed. It is not elegant. It is not inventive. It is so much better than that. We finish with a thick-set lemon posset full of zest and, this being the Lake District, a sticky toffee pudding which is all the things it should be. We waddle out, finally content that Sunday lunch has been treated with all the respect it deserves. ■



Email Jay at jay.rayner@observer.co.uk or visit theguardian.com/profile/jayrayner for all his reviews in one place. Follow Jay on Twitter @jayrayner1

Jay's news bites

■ As well as its à la carte, Fergus Henderson's **St John** in London's Smithfield has long offered feasting menus to be ordered in advance. King of these has to be the whole suckling

pig roasted long and slow in their bread oven, to be eaten with the likes of bone marrow and parsley salad to start and Eccles cake with Lancashire cheese to finish. Feasting



menus start from £35 a head (stjohngroup.uk.com).

■ This column will always champion those fighting the good fight so let's hear it for newish Twitter account @WeWantPlates,

started by Ross McGinnes. Stated aim: to crusade "against serving food on bits of wood and roof tiles. Chips in little buckets, flowerpots and jam-jar drinks can do one, too."

■ The food of **Macau**, the tiny peninsula territory an hour's boat ride from Hong Kong, has arrived in London courtesy of a series of monthly pop-ups in Chinatown,

led by chef Lau Suet-Ming. Macau's cuisine is the product of centuries of Portuguese influence on local ingredients. For more info visit macaupaotua.uk

STYLE ALICE FISHER



Shore thing

Breton stripes, shark's tooth jewellery and Hokusai-style prints herald a nautical theme. It's time to go fishing

I've got one of those tradesman surnames that people like to chat about when they've run out of all other small talk. Fisher, eh? Ha, ha. Any fishermen in the family? Well, yes, actually. Unlike many Potters and Tailors out there, the Fishers were fishers until the 50s. My granddad worked a trawler out of Lowestoft.

My dad's earliest memory is leaving Beach Village, a fishing community which grew from a huddle of upturned boats in the 1790s into a settlement of 500 homes on Lowestoft's grim old pebbly shore. It was razed during slum clearance in the 50s, but by then most of it had been destroyed anyway by the great flood of 1953. My mum first heard my dad's name when their headmaster read out condolences during school assembly: my granddad's trawler was lost at sea, presumed destroyed by a naval mine left floating around after the Second World War.

So I feel a bit weird when nautical comes round as a trend. In fashion it tends to be kitsch: too much about shiny gold buttons and comedy anchors than the functional requirements of dressing for one of the most dangerous working environments known to man. So it makes me happy that this season's nautical offerings are more lateral. JW Anderson showed loose sailor trousers and decorated his dresses and tops with rope. There were outsized peacoats at Lanvin and Céline. Everyone from Chanel to Givenchy did stripes. The ghost of the sea was there but no one got too Pierre et Gilles about it.

Tibi, an American label that excels at bright colours and patterns, has a resort collection out now called "Dirty Sailor". It features a tattoo print which is an interesting mix of flowers and ropes. It avoids all "hello sailor" campy. If you can afford

it, buy it. If you can't, look at Cleo Ferin Mercury's work. She makes silk scarves and collars and her spring collection is also inspired by the ocean: specifically Hokusai-style waves and tropical seas.

For a simple accessory, the shark's tooth has become a bit of a thing at Givenchy. You can buy earrings, bracelets and necklaces featuring the fashion house's signature megalodon in everything from simple silver to diamanté. Or you could pay a bit less and pick up one by Rachel Boston. She's an interesting young jewellery designer whose work focuses on strong natural shapes.

Do buy a striped top, though. Every wardrobe must have one of these super-versatile tops that bring freshness and order to any outfit. Me + Em do nice ones, but you should really buy one from Seasalt Cornwall. This company works with local companies and uses sustainable textiles to create clothes that reflect Cornish culture. The business also makes charity products to help the Fishermen's Mission. I don't know what my grandfather would think of me sitting here spraffing on about the wearability of Breton stripes, but I'm sure he'd approve of that. ■



Anchor pinafore, £65,
misspatina.com

Shark-tooth
necklace, £170,
rachelboston.co.uk

West View
top, £55,
seasaltcornwall.
co.uk

Sailing
ship detachable
collar, £44,
cleoferinmercury.
co.uk

Model wears
JW Anderson S/S 15

Tattoo-print
skirt, £568, Tibi
(matchesfashion.com)

Double-breasted
peacoat, £198,
me+em.com

Visit theguardian.com/profile/alice-fisher for all her Observer articles in one place. Follow Alice on Instagram @aliceefisher

Beauty spot

The best pink lipsticks for spring

I am not “a Spring”. I am not a woman whose light complexion shimmers in the weak sunlight like a faun in a forest glade. I cannot wear pastels. But in this time of blossomy hues, even I want a break from my default tractor-pull of red lippy. I’ve found two in contrasting shades that work for those of us who aren’t so pale and interesting. **Clarins Joli Rouge Brilliant Shine in Rose Petal** (£19, clarins.co.uk) sounds floral, but there’s just enough hint of bubblegum to keep it lively. It even has a shine that stays on after you blot, so you get that dewy-mouthed effect, like a *real* spring beauty. A smidge less refined, **Rouge Dior in Vogue** (£26.50, dior.com) goes on creamy and delivers a vivid kick of hot pink. It put a bounce in my step, and gleeful thoughts of *Pitch Perfect 2* in my head. Fat Amy: there’s a woman you’ll never see in pastels. ■ **EMMA JOHN**

1 **Rouge Dior** as above
2 **Clarins Joli Rouge** as above
3 **Hydra-smooth Lip Colour in Air Kiss** £15, benefitcosmetics.co.uk
4 **Shiseido Veiled Rouge** £19, houseoffraser.co.uk
5 **Clinique Wow Pop** £16, boots.com
6 **Lord & Berry Vintage Pink Lipstick Crayon** £10, selfridges.com

Wish list Metallic shoes



Faux leather
£525, stellamccartney.com



Snake
£130, tedbaker.com



Light-up
£55, topshop.com



Ballerinas £653.28,
giambattistavalli.com (farfetch.com)



Glitter £205,
Marc by Marc (stylebop.com)



Double gold strap
£28, riverisland.com



Kitten heels
£160, whistles.com



Rose gold
£50, aldoshoes.com



Blue wedge £650,
Terry De Havilland (liberty.co.uk)



Silver straps
£39.99, zara.com



Hermione
£40, asos.com



Leather £300,
Acne (brownsfashion.com)



Suede £565, Rupert Sanderson
(net-a-porter.com)



Attila
£395, jimmychoo.com



Cut-out flats
£80, hudsonshoes.com

Line-up Dungarees

Banish all thoughts of decorating overalls and 1970s children's television presenters. Dungarees have had a serious injection of cool this season, thanks largely to Alexa Chung, whose range for AG Jeans is the epitome of dunga-chic. Style with loose shirts, flat sandals and a handbag that means business. ■

Shirt £75, Madewell (net-a-porter.com)

Dungarees £59.95, gap.co.uk

Square bag £115, finerylondon.co.uk

Slim-strap mules £185, whistles.com

Watch £225, Larsson and Jennings (net-a-porter.com)

Vest £21.50, hanro.co.uk **Dungarees** £295,

Levi Vintage (net-a-porter.com) **Sliders**

£150, Senso (selfridges.com) **Coated**

leather tote bag £350, net-a-porter.com

Soft trench coat £225, whistles.com

Saint-Honoré print tee £70, Etre Cécile

(matchesfashion.com) **Dungarees** £65,

and **furry sliders** £52, both topshop.com

Screw cuff £165, Miansai (selfridges.com)

Wide-stripe blouse £25.99, zara.com

Denim dungarees £295, Alexa Chung

for AG Jeans (liberty.co.uk) **Sliders** £89,

cosstores.com

Funnel-neck tee £39, finerylondon.com **Denim dungarees** £320, Frame

Denim (net-a-porter.com) **Platform**

sliders £130, whistles.com **Falabella mini**

cross-body bag £515, Stella McCartney

(matchesfashion.com)



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The April checklist

The hedgerows are in blossom and the magnolias are putting on a show. It's time to get the garden ready for spring

LATE FROST

Contrary to what you might imagine, sprinkling vulnerable plants with water the night before covers them in a protective layer of slightly warmer water if frost is threatening. Fleece blossom on wall-trained fruit if you are fearful, but remove it in the day so that the bees can do their work.

SOWING OUTSIDE

As soon as soil is up to 6C, it is safe to sow hardy veg, such as broad beans, beetroot and early cut-and-come-again salad. The salad will race on if you have the benefit of cloches.

SOWING INSIDE

Inside, and under cover, you will probably have already sown tomatoes and slower-growing half-hardy annuals, such as zinnia and pelargonium, but you can start annuals that need less time. Tagetes, courgettes and sweetcorn need about a month before they go out.

SWEETPEA SURVEY

Get the sweetpeas sown for a later crop. Plants already established in liners can be planted out safely. They like plenty of compost at the bottom of the trench, and twiggy support.

POND LIFE

Domestic ponds can look unsightly as matter at the bottom starts to



Ground rules: (clockwise from right) Dan planting out dahlia tubers; inspecting the new growth at the crown of an artichoke; and dividing *Rudbeckia laciniata*

decompose in warmer temperatures. Check that you don't have tadpoles, and drain by a third to allow easy access for the removal of fallen leaves and excess plants. Waterlilies like to be re-potted every third year. Remove the strongest growth to the outside of the clump and replant in a good loam, not a peat-based compost, which will rise to the surface. Leave debris beside the pond for a day before composting to let any wildlife crawl back to water.

REVAMPING BORDERS

Once you have cleared the borders, revitalise tired plants. Divide and

replant in replenished ground where necessary. Never be afraid to change things. Stake now to avoid having to wade back into the beds once they are grown. If you have staked, weeded and mulched, you should only need to stray into the beds a couple of times more before autumn.

PERENNIAL CULINARIES

Plant asparagus and strawberry crowns if you haven't already, and split globe artichokes back to strong offsets if they are beginning to produce less.

HANDLING HERBS

Leave Mediterranean herbs such as rosemary, thyme and sage until April to give them their prune. Clippings can be used as cutting material to keep short-lived plants in hand.

DAHLIAS

Plant dahlia tubers that have been stored inside into well-manured ground and if the weather warms this month remove any protective mulches you may have applied to those you left in the ground. ■



Email Dan at dan.pearson@observer.co.uk or visit theguardian.com/profile/danpearson for all his columns in one place



Is meat murdering us?

THE DILEMMA *As a family we've made an effort to reduce the amount of meat we eat. But do we need to become vegans?* **Leonie, London**

Today is the last day of Meat Free Week, the annual jamboree for meat reducers. I hope you've enjoyed it. So should you take your dietary activism to the next degree and cut meat out completely? Along with processed foods, animal foods are among those with the highest effect on climate and environment (including water use, air pollution and deforestation).

There's been a rumour that the grains on which vegan and vegetarian diets are based have a higher footprint than raising livestock, aka the "grain drain". It's a myth. While some crops have a shocking eco profile (soy, for example, grown in deforested monocultures), in 2005 one-third of the world's cereal harvest went to feed livestock.

Eating plant-based protein results in far fewer greenhouse gas emissions per "protein unit" than producing ruminant livestock like cows. In 2006 the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) produced a report, *Livestock's Long Shadow*, estimating that our meat consumption was responsible for 18% of anthropogenic gas emissions, revising it in 2013 to 14.5%, which is still pretty significant.

But if the world were to go vegan, that wouldn't solve an ecological crisis. Livestock does sustain small land owners globally. There's also the suggestion that there are only 60 years of topsoil (ie the life-sustaining bit) remaining. According

to ecologist Allan Savory, livestock is an essential part of bringing nutrients to that topsoil and staving off the desertification of arable land. His theory advocates bunched livestock farming, driving it through pastures to simulate grazing. Sadly, the livestock systems that dominate have nothing in common with Savory's vision.

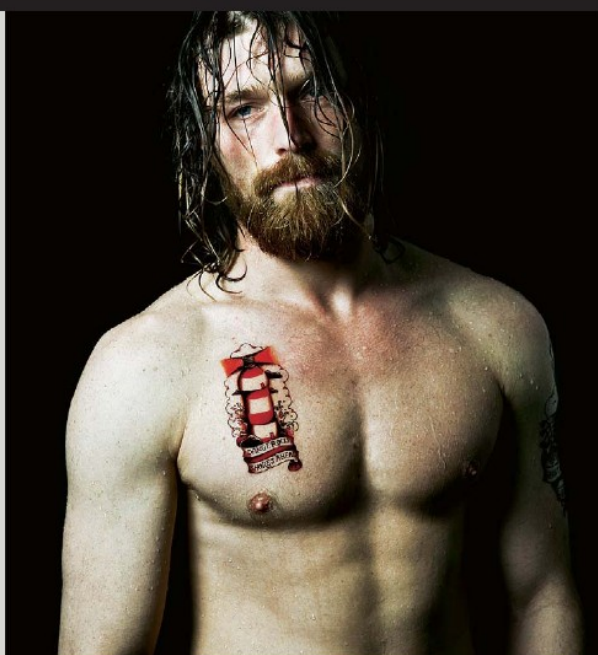
[Fern.org](#), which protects EU forests and their people, says that in 2012 UK beef imports were responsible for 1,160km² of illegal deforestation (an area two-thirds the size of London). There are also powerful interests

invested in preserving the status quo: [opensecrets.org](#), an organisation that tracks where political-campaign funding comes from, found that the US meat and processing industry spent \$7m on lobbying last year.

Science-based organisations insist that we need to reduce our reliance on resource-intensive livestock and invest in variety. We need to grow and eat more nuts and legumes – and research suggests there's a huge opportunity for the UK to farm more of both. Being a meat reducer is definitely a move in the right direction. ■

Green crush

Twenty-five years ago a group of Cornish surfers, sick (literally) of surfing among human waste, founded [Surfers Against Sewage \(sas.org\)](#). They probably had no idea then that their battle to clean up the ocean would last so long. But that's the thing about marine pollution: it endures. This toxic permanence is hammered home in an SAS campaign with Pennsylvanian tattoo artist Nick the Tailor. He's designed tattoos based on nautical themes which highlight issues such as single-use bags and ocean pollutants. Surf-world heroes Ben Skinner (pictured), Corinne Evans and Rory Williams of the band Sunset Sons have been photographed sporting the tats. According to SAS, which will host the Global Wave Conference in Cornwall this October, we are in the midst of a marine litter crisis.



Greenspeak

Clean cloud {klɪn klaʊd} *noun*

At last the giants of Silicon Valley are turning away from coal-powered data centres and going green. Also, Ireland and Denmark will provide homes for two huge data centres powered by renewable energy



If you have an ethical dilemma, email Lucy at lucy.siegle@observer.co.uk or visit theguardian.com/profile/lucy-siegle to read all her articles in one place

LIFE&STYLE

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Cold night, warm heart

Tin lid: the SL400 has a quick-acting folding hard roof



The SL400 is the latest in a line of luxurious cruisers – and what better test for it than a long midweek burn?

Rather amazingly the Mercedes-Benz SL400 is an entry-level model. It costs £72,500, which is almost three times the price of the average new car in Britain today (£28,973). However, it is still a good £10,000 cheaper than its near identical sister, the SL500 – the car which is one step above it in the Mercedes-Benz “pyramid of greatness”, as Ron Swanson would say. The SL500 has a V8 rather than a V6 engine, and those two extra cylinders will *vroooooom* it to 62mph in 4.6 seconds rather than the slovenly 5.2 seconds of the V6. If time is money, that half-second could be the most expensive you ever buy.

As the two cars are indistinguishable in all respects other than the size of their engines, opting for the “budget

Benz” is also the fastest way you’ll find to save money – £10k in 0.5 seconds. And that certainly beats stealing ketchup sachets, bathing with a friend or wearing a jumper.

A Mercedes-Benz SL is the retirement present so many slave half their lives for. It’s the car they dream of parking by the clubhouse so they can flash the gold Rolex as they duff another ball into the rough. But this car is far too good to waste driving to the golf club. Those magic letters, SL, derive from the German *Sport Leicht*, or Sport Lightweight, and they’ve been applied to sports cars built by Mercedes since 1954. The first model to carry the suffix (it’s a prefix now) was the legendary gullwing 300SL – to many, the most beautiful sports car of all time. It had a steering wheel that pivoted to ease entry and bumpers were an optional extra. Since then, SL has applied to models spanning six design generations. The last of which is this, the SL400.

Owing to a pretty epic domestic admin cock-up (the inquiry into whether it was *actually* my fault or not has yet to be published), I had to drive from London to Salisbury and back, about 230 miles, after work, on a miserable Wednesday night. But such is the allure of the SL, I spent the whole day looking forward to it.

Mercedes-Benz SL400

Price £72,500 MPG 36.7 Top speed 155mph

I left at 8pm and got back after 1am, spending five hours pummeling through the dark in the company of a true knight of the road.

Despite the chill and the dark and the drizzle, I kept the folding roof down (that’s the law with convertibles). The Airscarf neck warmer (the car breathes warm air over your neck and shoulders – but not in a creepy way) and heated seats kept me toasty. This is a cruiser you can use all year round, and if you do decide to keep the roof up, its tinted glass panels can be darkened at the touch of a button. Other clever stuff includes the Magic Vision Control wipers which fire water out of the lip of the blade in both directions so no water is splashed on the windscreen – that loose spray may disrupt your visibility for a second or two. On the other hand it does mean you can’t have fun squirting cyclists.

The SL400 is fast *and* frugal – its twin-turbo 3-litre V6, paired with the seven-speed auto, churns out almost 37 miles to the gallon. It’s smooth, elegant, enviable. They’d love this at the club... I really must start working on my swing. ■



Email Martin at martin.love@observer.co.uk or visit theguardian.com/profile/martinlove for all his reviews in one place. Follow Martin on Twitter @MartinLove166

LIFE&STYLE



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Take me there

Deauville, France

Why go?

With its Belle Epoque hotels, bathing huts and air of faded grandeur, the seaside town of Deauville is the French answer to Brighton. But instead of beach volleyball you'll find boules, and instead of fish and chip shops chic brasseries serving oysters and langoustines. Fashionable Deauville was once a favourite haunt of Napoleon and Coco Chanel, and a busy calendar of horseracing events, polo matches and the annual Deauville American Film Festival ensure that it's still on the circuit for high society. New flights being launched this year by Ryanair (from 3 April) and Flybe (from 22 June) will make it easier than ever for us to join them.

What to do

Take in the sea air on the Promenade des Planches – the famous boardwalk – or go window-shopping in the ritzy boutiques around Place Morny. Catch a ferry across the River Touques to the jolly resort of Trouville, which has a daily fish market, beachfront casino and regular exhibitions at the Villa Montebello, former summer residence of Napoleon. The D-Day beaches and attractive port of Honfleur are within easy striking distance.

Where to eat

No visit to this stretch of coast is complete without a bowl of moules



Safe haven: the historic harbour of Deauville is perfect for an evening stroll

marinière in the quintessentially French Les Vapeurs, a seafood brasserie in Trouville (lesvapeurs.fr).

Where to stay

La Cerisée is a charming little B&B in the centre of town with just two guest rooms, including a self-contained cottage with its own kitchen (from €130, chambre-hotes-deauville.com). Les Manoirs de Tourgeville is a cossetting hotel set in beautiful

parkland a few miles inland (from €170, lesmanoirstourgeville.com).

Insider tip

The best place to pick up specialities, such as camembert and cider, is at the food market on Place du Marché, says Yves-Marie Guguen of Les Manoirs de Tourgeville: "Traditional markets are held on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday and they sell local produce as well as arts and crafts." ■

For more inside tips, advice and holiday ideas, go to theguardian.com/travel

Give me a break



HOME

Peak District adventure weekend

Lost Earth Adventures is holding two activity weekends in the Peak District in May, which will give families the chance to try their hand at rock climbing, gorge scrambling and mountain biking. The weekends, on 2–4 May and 22–24 May, cost £249pp and include all activities, some meals, plus three nights' accommodation (lostearthadventures.co.uk).



AWAY

Living history in Brussels

Celebrate the bicentenary of Wellington's victory at the Battle of Waterloo this year with a stay at Hougoumont in Belgium – the site of Napoleon's final defeat. The Landmark Trust has restored a former gardener's house situated on this historic estate near Brussels and is offering stays in a two-bedroom apartment from £482 for four nights (landmarktrust.org.uk).

Dear Mariella

A man troubled by his wife's sexual past now no longer trusts her. Mariella Frostrup says it's the friend who told him about it that he should be suspicious of

THE DILEMMA *I am troubled by my wife's sexual past. I recently found out through a mutual friend who knew her before I met her that my wife had been a "bit of a groupie" and had slept with several men in bands. We have pretty much told each other everything about our lives, and this part of my wife's life has come as a shock to me, as I had no idea. I knew she liked to see bands play, but didn't know she had slept with the musicians. A mutual friend joked that she probably spent more time in hotel rooms than in her own bedroom when she was younger. I don't trust her any more, as this sounds to me like someone else, not my wife. It's all true, by the way – she did confess to it, but played it down. We have had some bad arguments about it. This has soured what was otherwise a good marriage.*

Nice friend you've got! But I'll come to your informant in a moment. This is the second letter I've had this week from a lover haunted by their partner's past. My first was from an 18-year-old dating a man of 28 with an ex-fiancée and two kids back in the gloaming. What was concerning her was how he could have had a second child with the mother of his first, a woman he "had never loved".

A relationship as a compromise or half-formed thing is anathema to most young people, who view the emotional world as a place of emphatic action ruled by prevailing passions far stronger than empathy or irrationality. This young lady seemed floored by the possibility that

this man could have loved before (unthinkable when you're young and naive) and baffled as to how, when whatever they had together waned, he'd failed to simply call it quits and lingered long enough to father again. Clearly this guy had made some foolish choices – you could argue one of them was saying that he'd never loved his ex. His teenage girlfriend probably needs to keep an eye on him as the relationship evolves to ensure that it wasn't wilful irresponsibility which has left him a separated father of two before his 30th birthday.

Why should I care about all this, you may ask. The reason is this – at 18 it's normal to imagine that you need to compete with a partner's past. You and I, however, know that one of the really satisfying aspects of maturity is the understanding it offers into life's less clear-cut scenarios. The human heart is an ever-expanding organ, and its ability to stretch and grow to encompass each new relationship is one of the miracles of life.

You have had a happy marriage and that makes you a lucky man. Your wife, like all of us, is of course the sum of her past, but all that adds up to making her the person you fell in love with. She's admitted she enjoyed some nights of passion with the objects of her desires – who wouldn't take such an opportunity when young, free and single? What more do you want from her

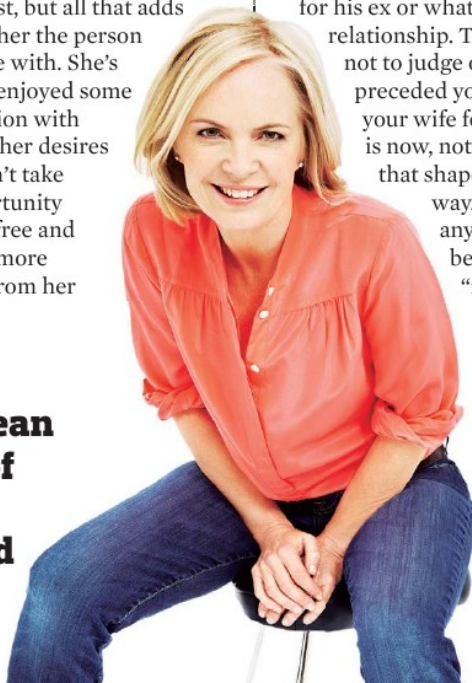
in atonement? It's not for you to judge or condone, accept or rage against; it's just what was. So why have you allowed this friend, who clearly has his own agenda, to let his "reminiscences" come between you?

To me this "friend" has something of the Shakespearean villain about him – he is clearly mindful of how a seed of doubt well sown can fester and flourish in the human mind. What possible reason could he have for his "revelations", and why does he feel he can insult your wife without you resorting to Neanderthal protective impulses? There's plenty of material in all our lives that is inexplicable even to ourselves, and when a third party gets involved, demanding logical answers, we tend to flounder about, digging ourselves deeper and deeper into the sand. If only life were so simple that A led to B and then to C, though that would be pretty dull.

She'll never be able to satisfactorily explain to you why she embraced a lifestyle you struggle to understand – and nor should she have to. Neither will my other correspondent ever know for sure what her boyfriend felt for his ex or what went on in their relationship. The solution is not to judge or dwell on what preceded you but to accept your wife for the woman she is now, not the experiences that shaped her along the way. If you ditch anyone, I suggest it be your so-called "friend". ■

■■■
If you have a dilemma, send a brief email to mariella.frostrup@observer.co.uk. To have your say on this week's column, go to theguardian.com/dearmariella. Follow Mariella on Twitter @mariellaf1

“”
This 'friend' has a Shakespearean villain quality – he's mindful of how a seed of doubt well sown can flourish in the human mind





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